journey

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Nancy Radclyffe

Collective Writer and Senior Chaplain

REMEMBERING YOUR PASTOR AT CHRISTMAS

How often have you entered a new group or situation and wished you knew what was accepted practice so you could fit in better? Maybe later on you would choose to vary from those practices but at first it would be so much easier. MCC is one of those new situations for us and even after we get involved new occasions arise leaving us to wonder what is appropriate now. While we do not want to be duplicates of one another (do we?) there are times when we could use a how, when, what guide to MCC. This column will address one of these concerns with the hopes of giving you some ideas and a starting place.

Part of the Christmas routine is to decide who we should remember with a card or gift. Those who think of their pastor in this regard may well hesitate not knowing if it is appropriate. Other concerns may be around what others will think or that it will make an underpaid pastor feel as if s/he must reciprocate.

Remember your pastor at Christmas! The ways to do this are as varied as the churches and people doing the remembering. The church as a whole should go together and give something to the pastor. Most often this is a check (like a Christmas bonus?). Some churches get money together by soliciting donations, depositing them to the church account and then giving a check for that amount.

Other churches plan this in their annual budget, perhaps calling it a "Pastor's Contingency Fund." The amount budgeted is then allocated by the board of directors among different celebrations throughout the year. These may include any or all of the following: Christmas, Birthday, Anniversary of Relationship, Anniversary of Pastorate, vacation spending money and special thank yous to the pastor. If you have an assistant or associate pastor the amount budgeted should include gifts for them as well although they do not have to be identical in amount to the pastor's gifts. From what I have heard, the amount of the Christmas check has varied from $100 to $500 depending on the size of the church.

Churches may choose to use the money to buy the pastor a gift. This is usually done when it is well known that the pastor wants a particular item and not because someone wants the pastor to have a particular item. It may be a stole, a briefcase, Bible, reference book, stereo or car accessory, etc. It is never an intimate item. The gift of money has the advantage of letting the recipient choose just the right thing.

Who should initiate this giving is another question if your church does not already have a procedure. The board of directors and/or staff are both logical beginning points, however, any member or friend of the church may suggest it to the board or membership-at-large.

Discussion, planning and collecting of money usually occur outside of earshot. The pastor may be asked to leave a board, congregational meeting or fellowship time while this is done. The pastor's spouse may be enlisted to help with this or if the person making the request has a mischievous grin s/he usually gets the hint and does not feel threatened. Sometimes, in addition to the overall church gift the staff or other group within the church may also elect to go together to give the pastor something.

Individuals may choose to give a separate gift or card as well. This is a personal way to say, "I appreciate you and your ministry." What these gifts are is more flexible. Keep in mind what your pastor would appreciate and/or use. This may be more on the frivolous side, something you know s/he would not buy but would like. It is never an intimate item or something more appropriate for a spouse to give. Look to more general gifts such as pictures, posters or an addition to a collection of what-nots. It may be something for both pastor and partner or for their home.

A card from an individual or couple with a personal note is equally appropriate and may have a deeper meaning for your pastor than a gift. Taking the time to share with him/her the ways in which s/he has helped you, made a difference in your life and/or in the life of the church has a value beyond measure. Even with limited finances you can make Christmas special for your pastor with such a note. I have kept a file of these and when I get down I look at these notes and come away with a lifted spirit and a better sense of my ministry.

While planning your Christmas giving, as a church or individual, consider also such people as deacons, student clergy, clergy on staff, members of the board, the church secretary, janitor, and spouses. The value of these will vary with many factors and this is okay. If members of the board are to be gifted by the church, some member or friend will have to initiate the idea and get help in carrying it out.

A remembrance of a three to five dollar gift certificate at a candy store or at that nutty gift shop or ice cream parlor provides a way that is fun and appreciated. As an individual a Christmas card with a personal note is fine. If one or more of these people have been particularly helpful to you or you have noticed their hard work with little reward it is okay to single them out for a bit more in your giving if you wish. Again, do not break your personal bank. Many of these people, like your pastor, put in long hours and deep concern beyond the minimum expected of their position. A gift or personal card is a meaningful way to say, "Thank you, I noticed and appreciate your commitment."

Pastors, if you feel obligated to reciprocate in a like manner recognize that there is no way you can afford to do so. Most of

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JOURNEY is a monthly magazine of UFMCC. The focus of JOURNEY is to provide news and report issues of concern within UFMCC and the Lesbian and Gay community. Contents are copyrighted and may not be reproduced or extensively quoted without permission.

Editorial Office: 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029. Phone: (213) 464-5100. Subscription rate $16.80 per year U.S., Canada, Mexico. $20.80 other areas. Published by Universal Fellowship Press. Printed in U.S.A.

All materials submitted to JOURNEY must be inclusive of gender, age and race. The Editor will modify any language not meeting these criteria.

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COVER: Paula J. Schoenwether

Council can't say No!

UFMCC AT THE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING OF THE NCC IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

by Nancy Wilson
Collective Writer

Going to Governing Board meetings of the NCC has become a semi-annual event for some of us in UFMCC. But this meeting in Hartford was different – it was the first time the Board would actually vote on our application – this time, on our eligibility for membership in the Council.

Frank Zerilli, Rev. Karen Ziegler, Rev. Jim Mitulski and I drove up to Hartford from New York City where I had been visiting my family. (Earlier in the week I had married my brother and his wife in a Methodist Church in Indianapolis – and visited with the President of the NCC, Bishop James Armstrong). We speculated during the three hour trip on the likelihood of a positive vote. We were sobered, and, I think a little nervous, knowing that this meeting was not likely to be as warm and fuzzy as the others – rather, more politicized "pro" or "con" UFMCC. Just weeks before, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, Archbishop Iakovos, said that if UFMCC were given even eligibility status for membership, six out of the nine Orthodox communions would leave the Council. (Later the other three Orthodox communions said they would do the same.) It was clear to us the Council members felt they would be voting for UFMCC or for the present unity of the Council.

We arrived in Hartford, most of us staying in the homes of members of MCC-Hartford, using one room at the hotel as a base of operations. Adam DeBaugh, Rev. George McDermott, Rev. Jennie Boyd Bull were there in addition to many MCC folks from the Hartford and New England area. Newly elected Elder, Rev. Don Eastman had arrived earlier and was preparing a variety of possible press releases that the whole "delegation" from UFMCC critiqued and refined. All of us discussed our feelings about the vote and what we were there to do: *To simply continue to share with members of the Governing Board and to witness to them about what God is doing with MCC and Gay and Lesbian Christians.* No vote could deter us from that purpose. We prayed together any number of times, and you could occasionally hear the unmistakeable sound of MCC singing from an elevator in progress, or from Room 516.

Our first contacts with Governing Board members were hushed and a bit frantic. We heard rumors that the United Church of Christ delegation was staying up late to draft a "compromise" resolution. The Methodists were feeling divided and defeated. Other delegations seemed resigned to a negative vote. Our supporters began contacting us, asking us how we were feeling. The Womens' Caucus became a catalyst of strategizing possible ways out of a lose-lose vote for the Council. An independent strategy group formed later in the evening. It was Church politics at its best and worst. Coming up with incomplete and inadequate solutions to ongoing struggles and problems, trying to arrive at the best we could hope for for all concerned. Friends consulted with us. Midnight knocks on doors, bishops and heads of communions awakened for support – who will make the substitute motion? Who will second? Will this succeed? Reporters kept asking us if we were going to withdraw our application.

The Woman With Stars In Her Eyes

A CHRISTMAS STORY

by Chris Glaser
Collective Writer

(Luke 1:46b-55; John 1:1-14)

Mary sat, dozing, behind five empty coffee cups neatly stacked on the plastic table in front of her, all her possessions in bags perched on either side of her on the McDonald's plastic pew. Her heavily powdered wrinkles and over-done red rouge heaved as she breathed heavily, snoring slightly. A pillbox hat with a bent artificial flower covered her matted and disarrayed graying hair. Even in sleep her hands clutched the ends of an artificial fur wrap surrounding her shoulders. Beneath that, a full length coat; beneath that a sweater; and beneath that another sweater. God knows what was beneath that, but down by her ankles the hem of a turquoise dress appeared, just above a pair of shoes seemingly too dainty for everyday use, with worn gold coloring. Of course, people in the fast food place stared, but not enough to get involved. That was her business, whatever it was, to look like that, to be like that. They did not get close enough to her to smell the cheap, but fresh, perfume she had put on just before entering Ronald McDonald Land.

Mary was dreaming . . . Dreaming of her youth, the days when the girl with stars in her eyes arrived by Greyhound from Florence, Alabama to become a major motion picture star. Then, everything had seemed so new and fresh – and possible. She had never been depressed in those early days. She had never been hopeless. The world seemed at her feet; she eschewed many a marriage offer to follow her star. In fact, she avoided many a commitment because she had but one responsibility, and that was to herself. All others would be her audience, all environments her stage. She even turned down small parts from sympathetic casting directors because she knew they were beneath her. She waited for her big break to come. She waited. And she waited.

The rumble of a passing truck woke Mary from her dreaming. No longer a girl with stars in her eyes; her opening eyelids revealed a dull, hopeless stare from uninspired eyes. The empty coffee cups before her reminded her that even five doses of caffeine were not enough to keep her awake; and yet at the same time she could not dream for long. Her dreaming days were over. The big break had never come, and she believed now it never would. "Time to go," she thought. But where? And why? Why was it time to go? She couldn't think of a good reason, but somehow knew it was time to go. She packed the empty coffee cups away in one of her bags, thinking to herself, "Never know when these might come in handy." Gathering her bags, awkwardly grasping her bundles, she departed.

She walked down La Brea to Santa Monica Boulevard, where, on the corner were gathered several young boys, flaunting their wares before passing motorists, cocky and confident, self-induced, drug-induced, and encouraged by the slowing of traffic as middle-aged married men with pot bellies lusted over their slim bodies, tight stomachs, and a youth they themselves were denied because of societal expectations. The young boys taunted Mary, picked at her clothing, one trying to pluck her fake fur. Her only recourse, because their agility far exceeded hers, was to hiss at them. They laughed in reply, mockingly hissing back. But vengeance was still Mary's. She knew they were taunting what they would become, if they lived long enough. And many of them would arrive where she was now many years before their time, because of the premature aging with which drugs and alcohol would curse them. She took a modicum of pleasure from this knowledge. They are like she was, she knew, thinking the world was at their feet, that they were top stuff, that they were young gods to the passing motorists. Already the stars in their eyes were being faded by drugs. And Mary knew the anguish awaiting them, that is, if they escaped the nightmare.

She moved on down the street, pulling a grocery cart she'd found to carry her bags. Mary noticed many of the stores had Christmas decorations, decorations of somebody else's Christmas, never hers. She never had a Christmas with snow, reindeer and holly. The way the shop owners cashed in on Christmas further depressed her. But the foil stars in one window reminded her of the stars she once had in her eyes as a girl, and of her star – that star that drew her to Hollywood, not for the birth of a Christchild, but for *her* birth, and her own stardom. She had never been satisfied with a star overhead for which she reached – she wanted to be that star, that center of attention, that glamorous attraction. Walking from the limousine down the red carpeted pathway to the entrance of Grauman's Chinese, fans screaming on either side, the night of a premiere of one of her many movies intoxicating her with glory. Ah yes, that was the way it should have been.

Somebody brushed Mary and woke her from her daydreaming reverie as she gazed at the silver foil star in the window. The person who nearly knocked her down pardoned himself sarcastically and took off at a run. Dazed, it took Mary a few minutes to realize her little beaded purse was gone. The man who bumped her was a thief, she realized. He had taken it. She wasn't too concerned, however. Mary is not stupid. She knew that later the thief would discover his great catch: five bobby pins, six rubber bands, a dozen used toothpicks (good for cleaning gum and other less respectable things from the bottom of shoes), two pieces of waxed paper that had wrapped hamburgers – in other words, just enough stuff to enable the thief to begin a new career as a bag lady.

Soon Mary found herself walking past

the Spike. She liked this part of her beat because of all the good looking men. She pretended they were not Gay, and that, in fact, she was walking through a movie lot, and that all the men were handsome actors who were doing various movies for the studio. There's one doing a western, she thought, and another a motorcycle drama about rebellious youth. And that one over there is working on the Wizard of Oz, and on the other corner is one filming a Rubbermaid commercial. My, what handsome young men, she thinks. But no women! The studio must be short of women – I must apply now, Mary pretends. She walks past the Eagle, the Nail – no places for ladies, she concludes. Then Mary peered in the window of the Gold Coast. It had been shattered by a customer who'd been 86d from the bar the night before. Through the fragmented windows, she viewed what she imagined as the studio commissary, filled with actors who played all kinds of roles, waiting for parts, waiting for the resumption of the filming, waiting to see how the movie turns out. A disco version of Joy to the World filtered out through cracks in the dark glass.

Mary continued on along the path she trod almost every day, past the small circles of Russian Jews speaking a language Mary could not identify, let alone understand, as she moved north on Sweetzer. Then past the young women waiting for Johns to round the corner, some of the young women threatened by Mary's presence as they wondered what their future might be, others patronizingly or mockingly greeting her, sensing Mary's harsh judgment of their chosen profession.

She took a rest in the courtyard of our church before sifting through what she considered the most interesting trash bin in the area – the trash bin of this particular church. "Most interesting trash in Hollywood," she often told people, though she'd never breathe a word of it to her competition – other bag ladies. As she pulled out the trash, she'd be amazed at all the happenings, the correspondence, the bulletins, and other indications of life within. "Church was never like this back in Alabama," she'd chuckle. But this particular day, Mary was in for a real surprise. Something extraordinary happened, she told me later, that no words could express or encompass. She couldn't even recall what had caused it, what she was doing at the time, what she discovered, but suddenly, she told me, there was, and here I'm quoting her, "An explosion of light – no sound, no force of wind – but an explosion nonetheless. An explosion of light! And I was blinded. I couldn't see. I couldn't see a thing. I didn't really feel frightened, but totally calm. When it was over, the light totally disappeared, but suddenly I discovered these stars in my eyes," she said, leaning forward into the church office as she described her experience of the day before, leaning forward so that I might see the stars in her eyes. "Do they keep you from seeing?" I asked, surprised. "Well, not really," she hesitated. "They keep me from seeing what you see perhaps." "What else is there to see?" I asked, puzzled. "I'm not sure, but I see something different. Something different than I've seen before."

Then she explained that that was in fact the reason she entered my office. "What was in that trash bin?" she asked first. "I don't know," I replied, thinking back on what might have been placed there. "But we have liability insurance if you've been injured," I quickly responded, knowing how sue-happy Californians are. "No, I'm not injured," she cried impatiently. "That's just it. My whole outlook has changed – for the better, I think. Whatever you threw away benefited me – it was of great value. I know you have the most interesting trash around but I can't understand how you all would be stupid enough to throw away whatever it was I found." "Well, what *was* it you found?" I inquired. "I don't know." "How did it affect you, other than those stars in your eyes?" I pursued the question.

"This morning, for instance," she began, "I didn't need five cups of coffee to help wake myself up. In fact, I seemed to perk right up, as if I were happy to be awake, without any coffee. And the people at McDonald's seemed friendlier to me, unafraid to get close. The hustlers who make fun of me everytime I go by them on Santa Monica Boulevard made fun of me again today, but I was able to kid them back and joke with them rather than get angry. I found that the Christmas decorations in the windows and the businesses that capitalize on the season didn't depress me. I found the men down by the bars friendlier, and I took some time for some very precious conversations. They kind of sought counseling from me – telling me their problems as if I could help – no, not as if I could help, as if I could listen.

The groups of foreigners I see sometimes gathered on street corners – though I still couldn't understand their language – I exchange smiles. And I no longer felt judgment for the prostitutes I passed on Sunset Boulevard. And your church – it was no longer simply a place to find interesting trash. It had a greater significance . . ." "What caused all these changes?" I asked.

"I don't know . . .I guess I saw things differently. Something to do with these stars in my eyes. I remember, I first came to Hollywood with stars in my eyes – following my star. But these stars are nothing like them," she said, leaning forward again for me to see the stars sparkling in her eyes, "I mean, have you ever seen anything like these?" she asked rhetorically. "Before the star I was following was mine. *I* wanted to be the star. But now I see a star that is not mine and will never be mine. I will never be the star. But I feel drawn to it. As if it will lead me somewhere. And right now, I see everything differently."

"See everything differently?" I have a good counseling response.

"This morning I saw the present is better than my vain dreams of the past or what might have been. At McDonald's, I saw potential friends instead of threatening strangers. I didn't see hustlers standing on Santa Monica – I saw hurting young men with potential for love and creativity. In the bars further east, I saw men with the potential of making commitments – to each other, to helping other people, even to the Church. The people who speak a different language I saw as family members. The prostitutes I saw as strugglers and survivors like myself. And this church . . ."

"This church?" I repeated, my curiosity piqued.

"Well, I saw your potential."

"Yes?" I replied, eagerly waiting.

"It was no crystal cathedral," she hurriedly spoke up, almost apologetically. "But what I saw was magnificent. You have tremendous potential. Your people I mean, not just the building. Your ministers."

"You mean the staff?" I asked.

"Not just the staff – all your members were ministers. It was a church full of ministers!"

I was impatient to discover what Mary the bag lady had found in our trash. "I have a friend who uses hypnosis in therapy," I told her. "He can help you remembers things. Would you be willing for us to go and see him and find out what you ran across in our trash bin? I think it's very important."

"Yes, if you wish," Mary replied cooperatively. "May I use your Women's Room first?"

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reflections

A NEW BEGINNING: REFLECTIONS ON WESTERN CLERGY CONFERENCE

by Jack St. John
MCC San Jose, California

(NOTE: This is one man's reflection on one of the events which took place at Western Clergy Conference in San Diego the week of November 6. It is not intended to speak for the entire group which participated.)

"And the *Logos* ('Word') became *sarx* ('flesh,' by synecdoche, 'human,' 'embodied') and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:14)

We sat on the floor, circular, cross-legged, sprawled, emotionally and physically extended about as far as we could go. An interesting group: men, women, radicals, moderates, Westerners, Easterners, young, experienced. Verging on an intimacy of group, making some skeptical, others fearful, all anticipatory. Very near *ensemble*.

For two days we had listened, responded, challenged and processed with James B. Nelson, author of *Embodiment*. This nonobtrusive, simple man did not need to be *the expert* here, but became the catalyst, facilitating interaction between individuals seeking answers through the group.

The discussion had boiled down to this: for people who experience themselves as sexual beings, how do "Logos" and "sarx" become embodied – integrated – in each, personally? How is this embodiment, and perhaps even the process of achieving it, different for women and for men? This certainly was not a new topic, in fact many of these same people had attempted to answer the question at Camp Letts two years before. They said that things were different here. Although strong conviction, with accompanying emotion, was present, immediate and compelling, the mood remained pregnant with promise of emerging life, not abortion. For whatever reason, perhaps a blending of exhaustion and hope, something *was* happening.

The sisters shared first, mostly reaction to immediacies from earlier that day when the topic had turned to issues of male sexuality. Men could listen now, but not interact. Slowly a continuum emerged – women were tired of holding their little brothers' hands. The woman's movement was not for men. Somewhere inside the feelings of ripped-off female images, applied now to emerging "maleness," somewhere inside the sisters' own security and insecurity of community; somewhere inside the love-hate relationship which was the reactive point for each and all of them; somewhere here was their answer to Christ's embodiment. "Womyn" was a necessary component.

Throughout it all, intimacy became more and more the issue. Was it true that men bonded intimately first to women ("Mother"), so intimacy between men and women was easier than intimacy between men and men? Didn't women bond first to mother, too, and is that why women's community seemed easier to develop? When we sang, "Are You One With the Cycle of Life," did the linear-thinking men really know what that meant?

Time was called and the action changed. Men began to share. For many this was the first time. Sisters' presence seemed necessary to make it safe, so again they birthed the men, with sighs of "is the travail *really* over?" and the cosmic smile of knowing it was omnipresent.

Why didn't (couldn't?) the brothers look at each other, but at women instead? Did they misunderstand the rules of this exercise, that they were to talk with EACH OTHER, while the women observed? Would the sisters have to physically turn their backs to *force* the painful connecting of male eyes in intimate sharing? Finally, the dam broke.

Brothers' feelings of rejection by the sisters they had supported and emulated. Frustration at having no other non-patriarchal model. Dawning awareness of how sexual activity can distance rather than promote intimacy. Despair at being at square one, wondering where the energy would come from to move on. Confusion at how the Jesus-model we have been taught fits into the whole scheme. Excitement at discovery of community – primal – but THERE . . .

More sighs of relief, then, as the whole group interacted. Even the skeptics let down their guards to confess their initial skepticism and to give their conditional blessing to the new creation.

As the nova began to wane, immediacy was replaced by . . .what? It was hard to name but easy to feel. It was, indeed, a new creation. It would take time for the globe of emotion and intellect to come under Ruwah's integration; but there was that warm, anticipatory, waking energy which promised that the journey had begun, and that it just might continue.

Ordained clergy dies

The Board of Elders is saddened to announce the death of Rev. Sandra K. (Sandy) Taylor, 36, an ordained UFMCC clergywoman. Her death was caused by an overdose of Tylenol aggravated by pre-existing health problems and resulting complications.

Sandy was a graduate of Midwestern Bible College and first became associated with UFMCC through MCC Detroit (1976-1978). She co-pastored MCC Louisville, KY from 1978-1981. From 1981 to the present she completed her MSW, while in Louisville, and worked on establishing a pastoral care ministry called "Lifestreams" with her partner in ministry, Rev. Anne Keast.

Sandy was ordained at the Houston General Conference.

A Memorial Service was held at MCC Detroit, Saturday, December 3, 1983. Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson officiated. Donations in Sandy's memory may be sent to the Spiritual Life and Clergy Care Center of the Fellowship. The address is SLACC-UFMCC, P.O. Box 691566, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Rev. Anne Keast, c/o MCC Louisville, KY, P.O. Box 8071, Louisville, KY 40208.

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Although many painted that to be a noble solution, we believed that God had not brought us this far to take an easy way out for anyone, including ourselves.

The agenda for November 9, the day of the vote, was cause for questioning itself. Was it a "plot" or sheer coincidence that the day's agenda was "The Family?" The NCC has been trying to undercut right-wing attacks that accuse it of being anti-family. And the NCC has tried to re-define the pro-family rhetoric for liberals. But why a whole day of "family" (the only day in the triennium) right before *our* vote? Especially since to be pro-Gay and Lesbian is, according to right-wing rhetoric, to be *anti*-family, and vice versa. We talked to Governing Board members, asking them to remember that Gays and Lesbians have families, too, and are members of families, and that the issue of the dignity of our people is a family issue.

I don't know if the program was boring, or if we were just too anxious to pay close attention, but the morning and afternoon were tedious. Troy called our hotel suite a few times from San Diego, at Western Clergy Conference, to see if anything had happened yet. One half hour before, Bishop Armstrong gave an emotional account of his very recent trip to Egypt to visit the Coptic Orthodox Pope who is under house arrest in Egypt. While his visit to the imprisoned pope was immensely important and productive, the timing of his report reinforced the suspicion (maybe paranoid?) that the vote was being set up for us to lose, and lose big.

The press kept after us all day. We did TV, radio and print media interviews, background stories (after a while you feel like you can just turn on automatic pilot as you begin to say, "MCC was founded on October 6, 1968 . . .). As the time neared, tension mounted. The Constituent Membership Committee presented the motion for our eligibility – according to them we clearly met all criteria for membership. Then Bishop Leroy Hodap of Springfield, IL stood up and offered the substitute that proposed that the Council "take no vote" on our eligibility. Dr. Avery Post, head of the UCC, stood to second the substitute motion, and others rose to defend or oppose it. Parliamentary maneuverings and confusion unparalleled by anything I've ever seen at a UFMCC General Conference ensued. The motion got drastically edited, but, though battered, survived to the final vote. The outcome reads as follows:

The National Council of Churches of Christ is resolved to: Recognize that our reluctance to take action on the eligibility for consideration for membership of the UFMCC results from unresolved differences regarding ecclesiology, interpretations of the Word of God, human sexuality and Christian unity within the NCCC; Postpone indefinitely the vote on the eligibility for consideration for membership of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; and to develop a process whereby the NCCC and the UFMCC can remain in study and conversation together.

The vote was 116 - 94 in favor. Some voted for the motion who simply wanted to avoid the issue totally. Others voted for the proposal to save us from a negative vote. Others voted for it to keep the Orthodox from having to leave the Council. Persons who voted against the proposal were in the majority opposed to our membership, but some were so strongly in favor of our eligibility that, for them, it was important to have the opportunity to vote yes, that day, for our eligibility. All in all, we estimated perhaps a third support at least our eligibility (if not membership), another third are opposed to both, and another third (perhaps the largest of the three) are in great conflict. That is an amazing growth in support in only two years. At the end of the vote, the Chair of the Membership Committee, Rev. Oscar McCloud, rose in protest to ask the Governing Board to give *new* criteria for eligibility if the present were inadequate to make decisions!

The press mobbed us after the vote, which we unashamedly interpret as a victory, since it was *not* a No, and since one of its main tenets was *continuing dialogue*. Questions arose as to whether "postpone indefinitely" meant we had to reapply (the Constitution and By-laws committee is going to have to decide that); and when, or under what circumstances can the matter be brought back on the table? No one seems to know at this point. The likelihood is that no more votes will be taken this triennium (which ends at the end of 1984). That is the clear wish of the leadership of the Council. Of course, the membership of the Governing Board of the Council will change by as much as a third in a new triennium – a third more people to educate again – but, that's what we are there to do!

As the press was getting our instant reaction to the vote, an important moment came for a friend of mine. Chris Cowap, a NCC staff person (and an Episcopal lay woman) requested special permission to speak to the Governing Board, and came out as a Lesbian. In her very moving speech, Chris assured the NCC that, "Many of us (Gays and Lesbians) are among you and are here to stay." As she sat down, Governing Board members rose to their feet in a gesture of silent support.

After she finished, she was rushed and embraced by supportive friends and colleagues (including her boss and an Episcopal Bishop). What a joy and affirmative punctuation to the reality that we *are* everywhere, and that this issue is never going away.

But that was not the end of the story. Some more folks came out to us, heterosexual sisters and brothers wept and laughed with us, hugged us, told us to hang in there. An African Methodist Episcopal Zion Bishop with whom Adam DeBaugh has become friendly, suggested we merge with them and join the Council! To Adam he said, "And you could be a Bishop." Adam replied, "really?" The Bishop explained "Yes, but only on *our* terms" (meaning homosexual celibacy at best, I assume). Adam graciously declined the offer.

It was strange to be joking with our "opponents." One Orthodox laywoman told us that at one point the voting on amendments became so hopelessly confused, that the whole Orthodox delegation voted one way, and the Bishops voted the opposite way! They all broke into laughter and threatened to send the Bishops to Albania. For a moment, it reminded me of some of our General Conference frivolities. Are we so different?

The press liked to pit us against the Orthodox, and we began to try to blunt that. Many Churches in the Council feel no differently about our application than the Orthodox, but let the Orthodox take the brunt of the negative response. The Orthodox Churches are not our enemies. Our enemies are ignorance, homophobia, racism, sexism, classism, hatred, oppression, close-mindedness. And these know no denominational bounds.

As if the first day wasn't enough, the next day brought discussion of the NCC's controversial *Inclusive Language Lectionary*. On the panel that evening was none other than Dr. Virginia Mollenkott. All of us MCC folks packed the visitors area to hear her. In addition to being brilliant as usual on the issue of inclusive language, Dr. Mollenkott ended her speech by saying she felt compelled to make a statement about UFMCC's application. Very simply she

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UFMCC's Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order

"ALL IS LAWFUL . . . . WHICH LOVE PERMITS"

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Two basic questions we must ask at the outset are "What does the word 'ethics' mean?" and "What are we to expect from a study of ethics?"

A Definition of Ethics

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Why Study Ethics?

What are we to expect from a study of ethics? What are we to hope for from the work of a moral theologian? Dietrich Bonhoeffer has given a valuable limitation to what the moral theologian can do for us in his *ETHICS*: "An ethic cannot be a book in which there is set out how everything in the world actually ought to be but unfortunately is not, and an ethicist cannot be [one] who always knows better than others what is to be done and how it is to be done. An ethic cannot be a work of reference for moral action which is guaranteed to be unexceptionable, an ethicist cannot be the competent critic and judge of every human activity. An ethic cannot be a retort in which ethical or Christian human beings are produced, and the ethicist cannot be the embodiment or ideal type of life which is, on principle, moral." [1]

Christian ethics does not prescribe a code of behavior for contemporary humanity, contrary to the definition frequently given the term. Georgia Harkness, in her book, *Christian Ethics*, [2] points out that one can hardly locate the authoritative code in the teachings of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, or Calvin. If one proposes the Bible to prescribe a contemporary *code* of behavior, Harkness asks simply, "Where?" Does any contemporary person take the Book of Leviticus as an adequate guide for the ethical perplexities of contemporary urban life? Or the Sermon on the Mount? Certainly there is no automatic process by which a believer can lift out of biblical or historical tradition a moral commandment to meet a contemporary perplexity.

Types of Ethics

There are three major types of Christian ethics: 1) the ethics of obligation (deontological ethics), 2) the ethics of aspiration (teleological ethics), and 3) relational ethics.

The ethics of obligation, the ethics of the "right," starts with the question "What is required by the great law or lawgiver;" The deontological approach concerns itself with duty or moral obligation. Rules and laws are the central concern of this type of ethics. Deontologists believe that the standard of right and wrong should rest on one or more rules: "We should always love," "Treat others as you want them to treat you."

A faithful Jew stayed as close as possible to the observance of the law even when having to depart from it. Jesus stayed as close as possible to the fulfillment of human need, no matter how wide of the law this led him. Judaism varied the rules so as to care for human need. Jesus quite spontaneously left the rules behind in order to take maximum care of those in need. Jewish ethics was a legalism modified by humanitarianism, which meant also that it was a humanitarianism *limited* by legalism. Jesus' humanitarianism was not at all fettered by respect for long-established custom or the preconceptions of legal definition. This love was, for Jesus, obedient love, not simply some humanitarian ethic. It arose from his prompt and

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total response to the demands placed upon him by God's inbreaking dominion.

Jesus' position was often far outside the law, and he came to take that position not on account of any consciously adopted antinomian (lawless) attitude, but by preoccupation with human needs, even casual and unimportant ones. Jesus believed serving the needs of one's neighbors to be infinitely superior to observing law. Jesus was willing to go outside the law, making himself of absolutely no reputation, in order not to separate himself from the people he sought to serve.

Legalism itself is not necessarily inhumane, least of all Jewish legalism. Legalists of all ages are simply convinced that it is in humanity's interest for the law to be obeyed. The business of Christian ethics does not consist in following literally the selection of rules from the Torah made by Jesus. It consists rather in employing their spirit of freedom in relation to the existing morality of custom and law "born anew and bred in every human" as Paul Ramsey so aptly states.

The ethics of aspiration, the ethics of the "highest good," holds the attitude that one must ask "What action will produce the most good?" It looks to the end product, the ideal. The teleologist considers the comparative good done and says that an act is good if it produces more good than any other action would.

This principle is spelled out in I Corinthians 10:23, 24: "All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his/her own good, but the good of neighbor." Restated, Paul was saying, in effect, "All things are lawful for me, all things are now permitted, *which Christian love permits*." In other words, "Love, and do as you then please." This does not by any means imply simply "do as you please," for by definition Christian love will be pleased only by doing that which the neighbor needs. In place of rules of conduct, instead of "the law," which Christianity completely finishes, comes not irregularity but self-regulation of free, autonomous individuals unconditionally *bound to their neighbors* by obedient faith working through love.

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What should be done or not done in a particular instance, what is good or bad, wrong or right, what is better or worse than something else, what are "degrees of value" - these things in Christian ethics are not known in advance or derived from some preconceived code. They are derived *backward* by Christian love from what it apprehends to be the needs of others. What love teaches cannot be identified for all times and all historical or social circumstances with any particular program such as prohibition or socialism. Persons who desire rigid allegiance to certain programs for social reform, or the imposition of rules that will remove all doubt about how the individual should conduct him/herself, will have to go elsewhere than to Christian ethical theory. Christian love - whose nature it is to allow itself to be guided by the needs of others - changes its tactics as easily as it stands fast.

The situationalist or relationalist "enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of [the] community and its heritage, and treats them with respect as illuminators of [his or her] problems. Just the same [he or she] is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so." [3] For the situationalist even the most revered principles may be thrown aside if they conflict in any concrete case of love. Relational ethic holds that there is only one principle, love, without any prefabricated recipes for what it means in practice, and that all other so-called principles or maxims are relative to particular, concrete situations. If it has any rules, they are only rules of thumb. It is necessary to insist that situation ethics is willing to make a full and respectful use of principles, to be treated as maxims but not as laws or precepts.

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Samaritan

THE LIBRARY AT SAMARITAN

by Pat Meecham

I believe the largest single asset in UFMCC, other than our good name and buildings owned by individual churches, is the library housed at Samaritan. We would like to tell you about our library and suggest ways that you might better utilize and support it in the future.

When I first became associated with the library I was pleased to note that we use the Library of Congress cataloging system. That means that we fit into the best system commonly used in the United States and the one used by almost all university systems, research centers and seminary collections. We might be rather small when compared to some of them (we are approaching 5,000 volumes), but we have the proper foundations that will enable us to expand easily.

We do not have a budget and in the past have depended on gifts from friends of Samaritan. Thus some of our areas of interest are well-stocked (we have three sets of the "Interpreters Bible") and other areas need much attention (we are weak in women and ethnic studies and writings). Also we have often had only certain positions represented; in the last year a generous donation gave us a much better balanced collection in Bible commentary. We now have books representing the wide diversity in Christendom on these matters and the equally wide diversity in our Fellowship. We have attempted to inform churches and interested persons of our distinct needs by giving them titles and authors that we would like to add to our collections. The results have been positive and we are considering doing this again this year.

At present we are facing space problems. We have thousands of books that we are unable to process until the school moves to larger facilities. We do have some special materials in our library. We keep all the ordination theses from pastors in our Fellowship. These represent a unique body of research on the theology of our pastors and the sociology of our community. We have a complete 18 volume set of Braille Bibles published by the American Bible Society (KJV) and a five volume set of Braille New Testament published by the Braille Institute of America (KJV). We would be happy to loan these to anyone who could make use of them with a recommendation by a local church.

We have a file of UFMCC journals including *In Unity, Gay Christian, Journey*, an almost complete set of *The Advocate* and other magazine collections. We could use collections of *Christopher Street, After Dark* and other community-oriented journals. We are fortunate to have the National Gay Archives in Los Angeles and we have closely worked with them in the past.

We also have a wonderful collection of old religious works from the 1840's and 1850's. They need to be rebound, but we feel they should only be done by someone who has the skills to rebind in the fashion of that age. If you are a bibliophile and would like to assist us in this enterprise either with information or financial aid, please contact us. These are a stunning addition to our library.

We urge you to visit Samaritan and look over the library. It belongs to the Fellowship and thus is your library. We also encourage you to consider the library if there is something in your personal collection that we could use? The books you donate, which are tax-deductible, will be used by people seeking God's truth.

I like to refer to the library as our "miracle library." It, like our Fellowship, is indeed a miracle. We have been able to achieve so much with little or no money. We are only at the beginning. I see someday a large library serving the varied needs of our diverse people.

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RESOURCE FOR BIBLICAL FEMINISM

GALATIANS 3:28 PRESS in Albuquerque, New Mexico is a clearinghouse for resources in Biblical feminism and human liberation in Christ. The PRESS publishes a newsletter, *PERSPECTIVE*, and sells books that cover all aspects of human liberation. The overall purpose is to reaffirm oneness in Jesus - that there cannot be Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. A complete catalog of all books offered by the PRESS costs $2.00.

The newsletter *PERSPECTIVE* is edited by Pamela Hughes. Each issue contains an update of resources available from GALATIANS 3:28 PRESS and a listing of other resources as well. Subscription rates are $7.00/year. The September/October 1983 issue of *PERSPECTIVE* focuses on Gay and Lesbian Christians and features an article by the editor about visiting a local MCC worship service (Albuquerque).

Two brochures published by GALATIANS 3:28 PRESS are *God Has No Sexual Preference* by Nancy Hardesty and *The Biblical Theme of Male-Female Equality* by Virginia Mollenkott. Single copies are free with a SASE.

Send all orders to GALATIANS 3:28 PRESS, P.O. Box 14126, Albuquerque, NM 87191-0126. Phone is (505) 299-0217

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said, "this summer, at the UFMCC's General Conference, I told them that *they* were my family. (there was a long, dramatic pause, and no one breathed). So whatever you do to these, my sisters and brothers, you do to me." And she sat down.

No one seemed to hear the next 15 minutes of presentations. MCC'rs wept in the back of the room. Governing Board members whispered, "What did she mean?"

We held the 4th semi-annual unofficial dinner of the yet unofficial Gay and Lesbian caucus of the NCC . . . with Chris Cowap as our guest of honor. Over the next two days, with Gay and straight friends on the Board, we developed a three-point strategy, consistent with the Governing Board's resolution: to support the formation of an *official* "Gays and Lesbians and their Friends" caucus of the Governing Board of the NCC (there are two openly-Gay Governing Board members now); to investigate increased UFMCC participation in various units of the NCC (their equivalent of our Commissions and Committees – we already participate in three); and to insure that UFMCC will work with the leadership of the NCC to design a plan for continuing conversation and dialogue. And, to find out the status of our application.

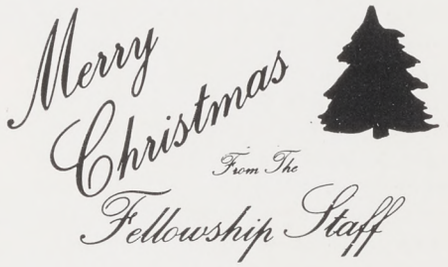
A highlight of the week, the evening after the vote, was the service of celebration at the Episcopal Cathedral in Hartford. I preached, Rev. Elder Don Eastman consecrated Communion, and MCC'rs and Dignity and Integrity members and folks from other Gay and Lesbian religious groups from Hartford all participated. Over 140 persons were present, including some Governing Board members (business was scheduled every evening). The worship was a strengthening and confirming event. It was part of a week-long celebration of MCC-Hartford's 10th Anniversary and a hearty welcome to their new Pastor, J.T. Atkinson and his spouse, Dennis Rogers.

I keep hearing in the Fellowship some fears that our application to the NCC is a move to gain "respectability." As much as that might be a temptation, it is not now, nor has it ever been, our goal. Frankly, even the NCC is having trouble these days with "respectability." We had to confront in Hartford that a "No" vote could have been (and might yet be) a *painful* experience for us. But *not* an ultimately tragic one. The "No" of the established Church is an old, not a new song – and we move against it with humility and in the power of the Spirit. It is a "No" that is dying. In Hartford, for all the threats to unity, they could not bring themselves to say it. Our "Yes" together in Jesus Christ is already happening, come what may with councils and votes.

After the vote, and in response to Chris Cowap's coming out, the President of the Council, Bishop James Armstrong said, "Chris, the ground is level at the foot of the cross." That's exactly what we've tried to say and witness to. Amen.

FOOTNOTE: Less than one week after the NCC meeting in Hartford, Bishop James Armstrong resigned as President of the NCC and as Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Indiana. The resignation came because of "serious personal problems which have created a severe family crisis," according to Indiana United Methodist Communications Director, James Steele. The Reverend Phillip R. Cousin, First Vice President of the NCC and Bishop of the Ninth District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama, will assume Armstrong's post as NCC President.

The Board of Elders has communicated its expressions of support and concern for James Armstrong and the NCC.



The Gospel Truth

"Well, you remember how at Christmas
last year the two fairies down our street
wrote "Bah, Humbug!" on their front door,
using rhinestones in Olde English script
(You know how they are!)?

"Well, I just learned that last week the one
who teaches art at the junior college
told a group of students at the Christmas party
that Jesus was born without benefit
of heterosexuality, and less than nine months
after Mary and Joseph were married!
There really ought to be a law against such scandal!

"If we don't stop them soon,
they'll probably be claiming
that Jesus loves *them*!"

--Louie Crew

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you are probably so involved with fall projects and then getting ready for special Christmas events that there is not time to send cards to everyone (and for some there is no money even to buy and mail them). Consider cards or personal notes of appreciation to the board and your staff members.

If you are one of our growing number of pastors on a real full-time salary you might want to look for an inexpensive item – a decoration, a pen, a what-not – to buy in quantity to give one to each board and staff member as a token of your appreciation for them and the congregation. As an example, my first Christmas at MCC Orlando, I found an ornament, probably intended for couples to share, which said, "1982, Our First Christmas Together." I gave it to the board and staff in front of all of the people gathered for our Christmas Eve reception. I gave a brief explanation that I would like to give to all but recognizing the impossibility of that I chose gifts for the board and staff as representatives of the congregation. They opened them there so everyone could join in the giving.

Christmas is a time to remember those whom we love and appreciate, those who have cared for us often to the point of neglecting self and family. Limited church and/or personal finances are not reasons to overlook this opportunity. Some imagination and stretching of self can result in an extra bundle of warm feelings generated in yourself and your pastor and other church workers.

fellowship news

our journey

THE SPIRIT OF ROSEBURG THE MERCIES OF GOD

MOLLENKOTT, RODRIGUEZ ENCORE AT NORTHWEST DISTRICT CONFERENCE

by Steve Warren

What's the opposite of San Francisco? How about Roseburg, Oregon?

A brave band from this community of 17,000 located midway between Medford and Eugene (if that helps you place it) became the Northwest District's newest study group at the fall District Conference held October 7-9 in Olympia, Washington.

The courage and enthusiasm of the Roseburgers proved contagious to the rest of the conferees, and the fact that the approval of their status by the Board of Home Missions required the waiver of some minor regulations seemed to fit the theme of the conference: "With Eyes Wide Open to the Mercies of God."

While the Northwest District doesn't ordinarily meet in the spring of non-General Conference years, it voted overwhelmingly to schedule a special conference next spring to consider the revised Government Structures and Systems proposals which should be ready by that time. Plans were also approved for next summer's biennial weeklong retreat, which will again be held at Humboldt State University in Arcata, CA.

Harriet Merrick of MCC Portland was elected assistant to District Coordinator Rev. David Pelletier, while the district voted to retain Jim House as treasurer, Steve Warren as clerk, Jack Hubbs and Rev. Betty Pedersen as Faith, Fellowship and Order Representatives and Chuch Harvey as Lay Representative. Les Woodcock of Golden Gate MCC was elected to the new position of Assistant Lay Representative.

The Board of Home Missions approved guidelines for New and Continuing Works (Continuing Works are those which have not reached Study Group status after a year or more); and for lay leaders, clergy and student clergy applying for district work. An Executive Committee composed of four members at large plus the District Coordinator was created to handle the Board of Home Missions' affairs between conferences, much as the Board of Elders does for the Fellowship.

Business aside, two highlights of the conference were encore appearances by guests who had made this year's General Conference such a success.

Dr. Virginia Mollenkott proved she's not limited to one issue in a sermon and a lecture which blazed new trails.

Likewise Larry Rodriguez brought a new message to the conference, again punctuated by unwarranted self-effacement. He started by restating the church's mission in his simple, schoolteacher style; but before he was finished he had laid a powerful charge on laypeople to do their share of the work, and on clergy to empower and enable them to do it.

Rodriguez also conducted workshops about the Hispanic Americas Ministry, exchanging ideas and starting a network of individuals committed to the expansion of the project.

Mollenkott's sermon was variations on a theme of Love Your Neighbor, emphasizing who our neighbors are: "Look at the people you wouldn't want to be in heaven with. Those are the faces of Christ."

Her lecture was largely drawn from comments she had made two days before in an appearance at Yale Divinity School.

Celibacy, she told them (and us), should only be expected of those who "have the charismatic gift of celibacy." She lamented the attempts of others - "All that energy wasted in *not* having sex!" -

Womanspirit of MCC San Francisco sings during communion at the Northwest District Conference in Olympia, Washington. (Photo by Steve Warren)

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and questioned how far a movement would get that tried to impose celibacy on heterosexuals. Forcing it on Gays and Lesbians, she said, "is denying salvation by grace through faith" and substituting "Believe on Jesus Christ and abstain from having sex and ye shall be saved."

Regarding sexual ethics Mollenkott said Christian Gays and Lesbians spend more time working on them than others "because they grew up without a road map . . . People need to produce a sex ethic that is healthy and affirming, rather than a set of guilt producing catch-22's."

In response to a question about relationships she said, "It's important to be faithful to whatever covenant you made . . . It's not up to me to tell two people what kind of commitment to make . . . The reason to make long-term commitments to each other is to provide an atmosphere of trust."

One of Mollenkott's best received statements was, "Those who would say that AIDS is God's Judgment on Gay people had better be ready to say that toxic shock syndrome is God's judgment on menstruating women, that crib death is God's judgment on infants, that Legionnaire's disease is God's judgment on militarism."

In addition to remarks about sex and sexuality Mollenkott addressed sociopolitical issues and the need for us all to be political. "There *is* a poverty treadmill," she declared. "If people are paid less for their labor than they're charged for the goods they need to survive, that's *structural* . . . (We need to be) empowering people by giving them a fair share of the wealth."

Speaking of interpersonal relationships in general, Mollenkott said that when she's nasty to people she finds that It's because she's afraid. Nastiness is "a cry for love . . . Remember that in your dealings with people."

In confrontation, she said, "healing should be your goal" and in confronting so many vital issues, Virginia Mollenkott brought great healing to the Northwest District.

NORTHEAST DISTRICT CONFERENCE

Ninety-four people gathered in Rochester, NY Halloween weekend for the largest district conference of the Northeast District in recent times. During the weekend, the Rev. Willie White, founding minister of Metropolitan Community Church of Greater Rochester, was elected district coordinator.

The conference focused on growth and vitality in the local church. In addition to other conference presentations, each participant was able to take part in three of four workshops on congregational concerns, including leadership renewal, reclaiming inactive members, and the development of intentional ministry.

The Northeast District has been going through a period of intense soul-searching, seeking ways to strengthen its congregations spiritually, numerically and financially. "District lay people and clergy left here with a new sense of faith and optimism about our district," White said. "We are on the move."

The District Board of Home Missions approved a new study group in Syracuse, NY and set up a "between conference" meeting of the board to give the full board more opportunities to review and formulate ministry in the district, White said.

The new district coordinator has been in MCC since 1976, when he founded St. John's MCC in Raleigh, NC. He has 18 years of experience in ministry and came to the Northeast District in June, 1981, to start MCC-Greater Rochester.

He says he plans to spend his first months as district coordinator developing a good, open and obvious working relationship between the district coordinator and the congregations, with considerable emphasis on reaffirming the importance of chartered churches to the ministry of the district. He will also be formulating a plan for clergy recruitment and support for all Northeast District pulpits, he said.

Rev. Willie White
Northeast District Coordinator

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"Sure, sure," I said as I reached for the phone to call my friend. While explaining to him the circumstances and arranging an immediate appointment, I heard Mary scream in the restroom. I ran to the door shouting, "Mary, are you all right?" She came out, trembling, her face pale with shock. "What's wrong?" I cried. "When I was washing my hands in the sink, I looked in the mirror and I saw . . . I saw . . . ." Her horror prevented her from finishing.

"What did you see? What did you see?"

It came out of her as if it were stuck in her throat: "I saw a minister!"

"Is that so horrible?" I asked, a little put out.

"But it was me – I was the minister!" she clarified.

Needless to say, I wasted little time getting Mary to my friend who had her under hypnosis within minutes of our arrival. "What did you find in the trash bin of the church?" my hypnotist friend asked her.

Slowly Mary began to reveal her story, "I uncovered a plain brown paper bag marked 'Church.' Inside was a bundle of papers. An ugly bundle. Very ugly. It looked like a baby wrapped in strips of paper. But it was ugly. I could see why someone would throw it away."

"Why was it ugly?" my friend asked.

"The strips were like mummy cloths and had nasty things written on them in blood. I began unwrapping them. The first said, "Rumours." The second strip I removed said, "Grudges." Another said, "Bureaucracy." Another: "Budget." At this point Mary let out a scream, and began breathing heavily and sweating profusely. "I can't go on!" she screamed, though still under hypnosis.

"You must, you must!" came the reply.

She continued, "Then I took off another strip which said, "Politics." And a particularly ugly strip said, "Church government." Another – oh god – don't force me to go on, another said "Committees." Another "Commitment." Another "Sacrifice." Another: "Contributions." Then a big one said, "Gossip." And another strip, "Diversity." And one said "Disagreement." And "Distrust."

"What was inside of all these strips of paper," I cried impatiently, as she was prepared to go on describing many more strips of paper. At this question Mary's tormented face regained composure, even went a step further: her face became an expression of *shalom*, of peace and good will. She smiled. "What did you find inside," I asked again, but more calmly. "A star," she answered. "A star."

My friend and I looked at each other. "And then?" my friend asked her.

"Complete peace – an explosion of light. Blinded. Blinded by light. And I, I saw things differently. I saw people differently. I saw myself differently."

My friend turned to me. "Sounds like somebody threw the baby out with the bathwater!" he commented. "They threw away this star simply because it was wrapped in ugly swaddling cloths – or papers, if you will."

I found myself replying, "The way she describes the package, I'm not surprised they did. But if they'd only have unwrapped it, they would have received the gift Mary received. They would have discovered the star at its heart. Only Mary cared to take the time and to exercise the patience required to unfold the mystery. Generations will call her blessed!"

★★★

our journey

by Ron R. Bergeron
Pastor, MCC Ottawa

The Date: *October 7 - 10, Canadian Thanksgiving*
The Place: *Camp Merrywood, Perth, Ontario*
The Event: *The first Eastern Canadian District Retreat*

After leaving a busy city and driving for many kilometers, one couldn't help but sense that something special was about to happen as the car left a small country road and turned onto an even smaller drive into Camp Merrywood. The autumn leaves were at their peak of colour. Even the overcast skies were unable to take away from the sheer wonder of all the oranges, scarlets, earthen browns and golds.

It was good to arrive Friday night and to be greeted by brothers and sisters from one's own church and from other churches in the province. All four groups in the district were represented: MCC Toronto, Holy Fellowship MCC (London), MCC Ottawa, and Christos MCC, a new feasibility study of MCC Toronto. It was special to see so many new faces; it was a treat to hug old friends. Around a blazing fire we warmed into the week-end's mood and knew that many blessings lay ahead.

The double theme of the retreat was Thanks and Giving. Again and again we were called into awareness of the many blessings that we have been given, all rooted in Jesus the Christ and in the presence of the Holy Spirit among us. Could giving be any more than a response to this Love? Presented with workshops geared to bring us to a clear realization of not only our own gifts, but those of our sisters and brothers, the command nature of Jesus' call to "love one another just as I have loved you" became more and more apparent.

Many of the workshops were fun, and we laughed. Some brought internal probing. Now and then we were guided into meditations that calmed and soothed us. A workshop on the Eucharist as Thanksgiving served to join our liturgical life to all other aspects of living that we find ourselves called to as a People of God.

Eastern Canadian District Retreat

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Each morning began with a Morning Thanksgiving and each evening closed with an Evening Thanksgiving. The services varied, as did the music, which served to reinforce our awareness of the many gifts assembled in our persons. The gift of serving was certainly one that we all shared, whether it be in cooking, cleaning up, listening, teaching, encouraging, or in any one of the many other ways in which we were called into serving one another.

By Monday morning there were no more new faces; we were all old friends. After the business meeting, we came together one last time for worship and to share some of the gifts that we had received during the weekend. While saying the Lord's Prayer in French, we especially remembered all of our brothers and sisters to the east of us in our district. The calling and the challenge was evident. Perhaps having our sense of mission heightened was that special gift that we had anticipated in wonder as we entered the camp on Friday evening.

NGTF DOCUMENTS EPIDEMIC OF ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN VIOLENCE

The National Gay Task Force (NGTF) reports that in the first eight months of this year, 1682 incidents of harassment, threats and attacks against Lesbians and Gay men were reported to its Violence Project. Documented by the NGTF Crisisline and twelve local violence projects across the country, these incidents will be included in NGTF's first annual audit of anti-Gay/Lesbian violence.

During this same period, the Gay and Lesbian community was hit by the first wave of violence attributed to "AIDS backlash." According to San Francisco's Community United Against Violence (CUAV), fear and hatred associated with AIDS was a motivating factor in nearly 20% of all incidents reported this year. The Dorian Group in Seattle also reports that gangs of youths seeking to beat up "plague-carrying faggots" were responsible for 22 brutal attacks this summer.

In Northampton, in central Massachusetts, homophobic assailants have laid siege to the town's sizable Lesbian community. According to Northampton's Gay and Lesbian Activists (GALA), over the past year Lesbians were singled out for sexual assaults and other physical attacks; Lesbian-identified establishments were vandalized, and hundreds of phone threats and other verbal harassment against Lesbians were reported.

Translation by Gaston

Date: 7 - 10 octobre 1983. Action de Grâce
Endroit: Camp Merrywood, Perth, Ontario
Evenèment: La première retraite du district est canadien

Après avoir quitté la ville grouillante d'activités et avoir roulé pendant plusieurs kilomètres, au moment où l'auto a quitté la petite route de campagne pour enfin tourner sur une plus petite route encore conduisant au camp Merrywood, personne ne pouvait s'empêcher de ressentir que quelque chose de spécial était sur le point de se produire. Les feuilles d'automne étaient au summum de leurs couleurs et même le ciel obscurci était incapable d'en atténuer leurs vives couleurs d'orange, de rouge, de brun et d'or.

Il fut bon d'arriver le vendredi soir et d'être acceuilli par des frères et soeurs de sa propre communauté et ceux et celles des autres autres communautés de la province. Les quatre groupes du district étaient représentés: MCC Toronto, Holy Fellowship MCC (London), MCC Ottawa et Christos MCC, une nouvelle praticabilité de MCC Toronto. C'était spécial de voir autant de nouveaux visages: c'était réjouissant d'éteindre de vieux amis entre ses bras. Autour d'un feu crépitant, nous sommes entrés dans l'atmosphère propice à cette fin de semaine et déjà, nous savions que plusieurs bienfaits nous attendaient.

Le double thème de la retraite était "Remerciements et dons." Encore et encore nous avons été appelés à prendre conscience de toutes les graces qui nous ont été données, toutes enracinées dans le Christ Jésus et dans l'Espirit-Saint présents parmi nous. Donner pourrait-il être plus qu'une réponse à cet amour? Les ateliers présentés étaient orientés de manière à nous amener à une réalisation claire, pas seulement de nos propres talents, mais aussi de ceux de nos frères et soeurs. Le respect suscité par Jésus et son appel à: "Aimez-vous les uns les autres comme je vous aime," est devenu de plus en plus apparent.

Plusieurs des ateliers étaient drôles et nous avons rit. D'autres nous ont amenés à une recherche intérieure. De temps en temps, nous avons été guidés à la méditation qui nous a calmés et appaisés. Un atelier sur l'Eucharistie comme action de grâce a servi de lien entre notre vie liturgicale et tout autres aspects de la vie où nous pouvons être appelés comme peuple de Dieu. Chaque journée a débuté et s'est terminée par un service d'action de grâce. Les services comme la musique furent variés, ce qui nous a permis de percevoir davantage tous les talents rassemblés en nous tous. Le don de servir a certainement été celui le plus partagé. Que ce fut cuisiner, nettoyer, écouter, enseigner, encourager ou toutes autres façons de servir les uns les autres dans la mesure où nous étions appelés à le faire.

Lundi matin, il n'y avait plus de nouveaux visages; il n'y avait que de vieux amis. Après la réunion traitant du côté temporel de la communauté, nous nous sommes réunis une dernière fois pour prier et partager quelques uns des dons que nous avons reçus pendant la fin de semaine. Pendant que nous récitions le Notre Père en français, nous nous sommes spécialement souvenus de nos frères et soeurs qui demeurent à l'extrémité est de notre district. L'appel et le défi étaient évidents. Peut-être avoir eu notre idéal missionnaire réhaussé était ce don spécial que nous avions anticipé dans toutes ces merveilles de la nature quand nous sommes entrés au camp vendredi soir.

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